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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TBILISI 003137

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: TBILISI ELECTION UPDATE 12/19/2007

REF: A. TBILISI 3112
[1](#)B. TBILISI 3118
[1](#)C. TBILISI 2999

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Ambassador and Gachechiladze Discuss Campaign

[1](#)1. (C) In a meeting December 18, United National Council of opposition (UNC) presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze told Ambassador he was certain the elections would go to a second round, and he expected Saakashvili to gain at most 15-20% in the first round. Gachechiladze said during UNC door-to-door campaigning, "85% of the doors are opening," demonstrating grassroots support for the opposition. Gachechiladze said the UNC is still "organizing the house" and gathering campaign volunteers. Gachechiladze's said his campaign is addressing the fair distribution of land in the regions, opening of new markets for a strengthened agricultural sector and an improved environment for small businesses. Gachechiladze clarified that if elected, he would resign the presidency within 90-200 days of his election. After the election, Gachechiladze would present the new UNC government to the parliament for approval. If the current majority United National Movement (UNM) parliament refused to accept his government, he would dissolve the parliament and hold elections 45 days later, extending the time he would serve as president.

[1](#)2. (C) Gachechiladze said he felt voters were afraid there would be retaliation by the government against opposition supporters and that voter lists were inaccurate, especially in relation to Georgians living abroad. Gachechiladze also expressed concern that the UNM would conduct an exit poll, but said if he could be assured the UNM wouldn't do a poll, he would not let the UNC do an exit poll and he could "almost guarantee" presidential candidate Badri Patarkatsishvili would not do one either. Ambassador told Gachechiladze the United States and other international organizations were not conducting an exit poll for the presidential elections, but would consider funding an exit poll for the parliamentary elections.

[1](#)3. (C) While a UNM-sponsored poll by BCG Research (ref B) showed Saakashvili with a major lead, Gachechiladze claimed some internet-based polls showed he had the lead, but that these results would never be reported on national TV. Gachechiladze said he "did not have his own television station," unlike Saakashvili who has three, and Imedi, which "belongs to Patarkatsishvili." According to Gachechiladze, Patarkatsishvili's participation in the election hurt the opposition, as he could take anywhere from 7 - 10% of the vote that would otherwise go to the UNC.

[1](#)4. (C) Gachechiladze told the Ambassador he would accept the election results if ODIHR and the United States report the

elections as free and fair. At a December 18 press conference following a PACE meeting in Paris, UNC member and Republican Party MP Levan Berdzenishvili echoed this sentiment, saying the opposition trusts international election watchdog groups and will accept the results of the January elections if they are endorsed by observer organizations. Berdzenishvili said "we are preparing not for January 6, but for January 5. If elections are fair, and confirmed by the Georgian people and the international organizations, we will recognize the results."

Campaigning Continues

15. (SBU) Mikheil Saakashvili campaigned in Batumi and Samagrelo December 18 where he was met by a large crowd of supporters. In Batumi, Saakashvili predicted that by the expiration of his second term in 2013, Batumi would be the most beautiful and successful city in the Black Sea region. Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, Imedi party, met with the ambassador-designate of France and media, while New Rightists candidate David Gamkrelidze campaigned in Shida Kartli. Gachechiladze, who campaigned in Samtske-Javakheti and Khasuri on December 17, told the Ambassador more than 1700 people attended his rally, 3-4 times more than expected, and more than Saakashvili drew in his 2003 campaign.

Patarkatsishvili Announces Campaign Program

16. (SBU) On December 18 Badri Patarkatsishvili announced his campaign platform on Imedi radio, adding that the official release would happen in a few days. Patarkatsishvili outlined plans to pay for the first 100 kilowatts of

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electricity consumed by each Georgian family over the next 18 months, as well as gas taxes, water fees, and a stipend of GEL 600 per year to each unemployed Georgian. During this time, Patarkatsishvili said he would also launch an employment program. During the following 24 months, Patarkatsishvili said he would eliminate the income tax and obligatory military service, provide large scale amnesty to prisoners, and free the business environment to allow businesses to increase their number of employees by 20% annually. In the final phase of the plan, Patarkatsishvili said Georgia would be like other European nations, with export incentives and a strong tourism and agriculture sector. During the radio interview, Patarkatsishvili did not explain how he would accomplish these programs, but when the interview was rebroadcast on TV, many Georgians rushed to Patarkatsishvili's campaign offices seeking immediate handouts. Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Legal Issues Levan Bezhashvili called Patarkatsishvili's campaign a "bribe for voters" and said the CEC should investigate his platform, but NSC Chairman Alexander Lomaia downplayed the campaign promises, saying "people understand pre-election ads very well and whether or not to believe them." Later on December 18 in an interview on Mze TV, Labor Party Leader Shalva Natelashvili accused Patarkatsishvili of stealing his campaign ideas.

Accusations of Election Fraud Continue

17. (SBU) The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) filed a claim in Tbilisi City Court objecting to Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava and Minister for Refugees and Accommodations Kova Subeliani taking "orders" from candidate Saakashvili during a meeting between Saakashvili and Abkhaz Internally Displaced Persons on November 28 (Ref C). Koba Dzidziguri, Conservative Party leader Kakha Kukava's brother and head of the UNC in Samtredia, Imereti, accused local authorities of forging the voter list, saying the constituency in Samtredia was 37,000 but the CEC list contained 46,000 eligible voters. In a December 18 press conference, Minister of Justice Eka

Tkeshelashvili pledged that the January 5 vote would not be rigged and added any NGO, political party, or citizen has until December 22 to provide information to the civil registry about inaccuracies on the voter list and the CEC will correct the mistake.

PM Increases Budget for Social Initiatives

¶8. (U) PM Lado Gurgendidze said December 17 an additional GEL 400 million would be spent on the government's new social initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and revised draft 2008 budget that will be presented to the Parliament will be more socially oriented. Gurgendidze also said the November 7 unrest cost the Georgian economy at least USD 500 million.

Monitoring of Television Continues

¶9. (U) The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) announced December 17 that Mze TV, Rustavi 2 TV, and Imedi TV had submitted their ownership papers. Documents showed Imedi is wholly owned by I-Media, which gave 100% control to News Corp Europe. Georgian paper Rezonansi reported December 18 that the authorities were "vigorous in finding out the owners of Imedi TV," but did not pay close attention to the ownership of Mze or Rustavi 2 (which are both owned by Georgian Industrial Group (45%) and GeoMedia Group (55%)).

¶10. (U) On December 18 the CEC released results of monitoring from December 12 -15 of four national stations - Rustavi 2, Mze, Imedi, and Georgian Public Broadcasting - and reported the most frequently mentioned presidential candidate was Natelashvili. Saakashvili, the only candidate running paid ads, had five hours and 40 minutes of advertisements. The remaining candidates are relying on legally allotted free airtime. Natelashvili had about 2 hours of coverage on news programs during the period monitored, followed by Saakashvili at one hour and 55 minutes, Gachechiladze at 50 minutes, Gia Maisashvili with 48 minutes and David Gamkrelidze with 45 minutes of coverage. The reports said most candidates received objective coverage, but Saakashvili was the candidate mentioned most frequently in a negative context.

CEC Will Open Polling Stations in Iraq and Kosovo

¶11. (U) Following a decision by the Tbilisi City Court, the CEC will open polling stations in Iraq and Kosovo to allow approximately 2100 Georgian soldiers serving there to vote.

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